



## M/V *Selendang Ayu* Alaska Oil Spill

**R**esponding to oil and hazardous substance releases, NOAA protects, assesses, and restores the nation's natural resources.

On December 8, 2004, the M/V *Selendang Ayu* lost power and grounded off Unalaska Island, near Dutch Harbor, Alaska in the Bering Sea. The 738 foot freighter, containing 424,423 gallons of intermediate fuel oil—a mixture of bunker oil and diesel that is a very heavy fuel that becomes even heavier when the diesel evaporates—and 21,058 gallons of diesel oil, was adrift for 36 hours with rough seas hampering towing efforts. Six of the 26 crew members were lost at sea during rescue operations when a helicopter crashed. That same day, the vessel broke in two. Pieces of the grounded vessel continue to release small quantities of oil into the waters surrounding the wreck, between Spray Cape and Skan Bay, some 25 air miles southwest of Dutch Harbor. To date, a total of more than 335,000 gallons of petroleum products are estimated to have been released into the environment.

### Providing cleanup support

Response operations and shoreline cleanup continued through the early fall, but have largely been suspended, temporarily, for the winter season. The wreck is continuing to be monitored by the U.S. Coast Guard and NOAA continues to provide scientific support as needed. During the active response and cleanup operations earlier this year and in late 2004, NOAA provided:

- Site-specific weather forecasts
- Documentation of oil on shorelines, in salmonid streams, and in submerged habitats
- Oil behavior and movement data
- Information on natural resources at risk
- Evaluation of oil recovery options
- Support to minimize environmental injuries

### Assessing injured resources

As a trustee for coastal resources and marine resources, NOAA is working with co-trustees (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Alaska) and the responsible party to conduct a natural resource damage assessment. NOAA and co-trustees have prepared a preliminary analysis of the natural resources at risk and are undertaking studies to assess the magnitude of the likely injuries.



*Environmental assessment team surveying degree of oiling*

The shorelines in this area consist of gravel beaches, rocky shores, and marshes. The site is home to many species of fish, marine mammals and seabirds, including several species of concern such as the Steller's eider (federally threatened), sea otters (a proposed federally threatened species), and Stellar sea lions (federally endangered).



Resource impacts from the spill include the following—

**Shoreline.** Some 70 miles of shoreline are estimated to have been at least partially oiled, to date.

**Birds.** Over 1200 dead birds have been collected to date; total number dead is unknown.

**Fish and shellfish.** Oil has been found in subtidal habitats and has contaminated commercially important fishing grounds, near the spill site. The State had closed all fisheries in the Makushin/Skan Bay area, but the area has subsequently been reopened.

**Marine Mammals.** Oiled sea otters were observed; five of which are known dead; the full extent of dead sea otters is unknown; stellar sea lions and harbor seals have also been observed in the vicinity of the spilled oil.

## Restoring natural resources

Once all injuries are known, NOAA and co-trustees will develop a plan describing the injured resources and services and the types of restoration projects to address them. Examples of projects for past oil spills include:

- Improving seabird breeding areas
- Improving anadromous fish habitat
- Removing abandoned fishing nets
- Restoring wetlands
- Enhancing shorelines
- Improving water quality

## What's Next

In the spring of 2006, as winter subsides, response activities will resume. NOAA personnel will continue working with the U.S. Coast Guard, the vessel owner, and other state and federal trustees to locate and cleanup any remaining accessible oil, continue assessment of natural resource injuries, and implement on-the-ground restoration when feasible.



NOAA scientist conducting biological assessment.

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*NOAA's Office of Response & Restoration—Protecting our Coastal Environment*

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